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by

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**Speak No Evil: Controversial Research Monkey Facilities Find a Haven in
Small-Town South Texas**

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Small-Town South Texas**

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Louise Tonneson Rodriguez

Report

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of
The University of Texas at Austin
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for the Degree of

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Dedication

To my husband Sergio, whose recollections of ranch and town life in his birthplace of Alice, Texas – where early vaquero tradition gave rise to the American cowboy – inspired me to keep peeling away at the layers of a little-known South Texas industry and whose love and enthusiastic support pushed me past self-doubt so that I could achieve one of my life's goals – earning a master's degree in journalism.

To my teenage daughters Gabrielle, Cecilia and Anneliese, who assumed additional responsibilities over the past two years so that appointments could be met, dinners could be cooked, laundry could be clean and school activities could be attended.

To the faculty at UT's School of Journalism, whose generous and invaluable mentorship motivated me to produce my best work.

Finally, to the more than 71,000 nonhuman primates in U.S. laboratories today, which are subject to invasive clinical and surgical procedures, intense behavioral studies and constant pharmaceutical and product testing so that we human primates can live a little healthier and a little longer.

Abstract

Speak No Evil: Controversial Research Monkey Facilities Find a Haven in Small-Town South Texas

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For over four decades, two secretive facilities in Alice, Texas, have imported, quarantined, bred and shipped to laboratories across the country thousands of rhesus and macaque monkeys. And residents grateful for employment in this rural oil & gas town – the site of a nationwide 1996 monkey Ebola scare – remain protective of the industry, despite persistent community rumors about poor monkey handling, animal escapes and past employees infected with a deadly monkey-borne virus.

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SPEAK NO EVIL: CONTROVERSIAL RESEARCH MONKEY FACILITIES FIND A HAVEN IN SMALL-TOWN SOUTH TEXAS

Ben Bolt is a fragment of a town, like someone took a pinch of neighboring Alice (population 19,285) and dropped it on dusty land a few miles away. On a weekday the town feels abandoned, except for a wayfaring collarless dog here and there trotting down unstriped streets and past brick and clapboard houses, some on lots overgrown with mesquite and live oaks. Even natural sound – like a kiskadee singing – seems to have left.

So it was a shock when Francisca Guerrero, hanging laundry in her backyard on an August afternoon last year, spied a monkey the size of a toddler hopping from one tree to another behind her one-story home. Her first impulse was to retreat indoors. The next was to call her daughter.



Figure 1. Trees in Guerrero's back yard became a temporary refuge for a monkey on the run. Photo by L. Rodriguez.

Yadi Charles tried to convince her mother to contact the sheriff. Guerrero refused. She told her daughter that she didn't want attention from the authorities. Guerrero is a private person

who lives with drawn curtains and locked gates on a fence that runs the full perimeter of her property.

Charles decided to call the Jim Wells County Sheriff's Department herself. But, she said, she soon became frustrated trying to persuade the dispatcher that a loose monkey was worth an officer's time.

"I'm sorry. There was a what?" asked the dispatcher.

"A monkey," Charles said, according to a recording of the call obtained through a public records request.

An awkward silence followed. Charles began to describe the animal's size in relation to her dog, then explained that since "it's not something you see all the time," she wasn't certain if she should have called animal control instead.

"I just didn't know to call you all or like ... the monkey farm."

It wasn't the first alleged monkey sighting in greater Alice, a South Texas city midway between San Antonio and the Rio Grande Valley. People there talk about monkeys traveling along the Agua Dulce Creek bed and recall a troop living on nearby King Ranch. The area has dealt with loose monkeys for decades, going back to at least August 1962 when the story of a stray monkey made the 124-year-old local paper, the *Alice Echo-News*. But that was a pet.

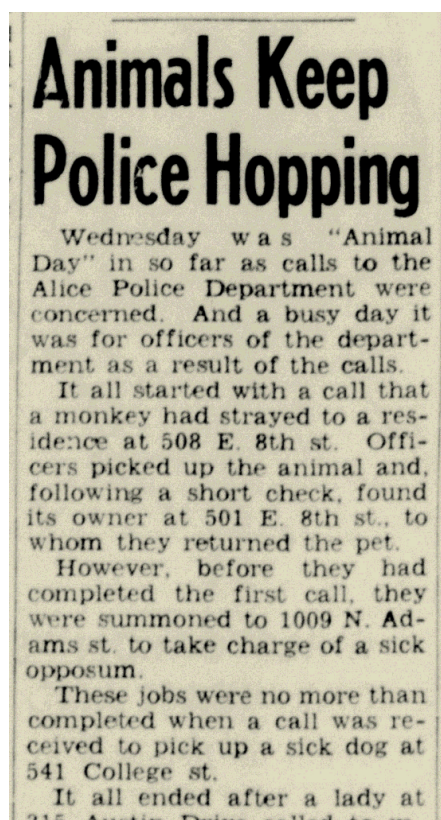


Figure 2. A lighthearted Aug. 23, 1962 Alice Echo-News brief informs residents about the capture of a stray monkey.

Today, a monkey roaming on someone's property in Jim Wells County is less likely thought by locals to be domesticated. Instead it's assumed to be an escapee from one of two primate facilities located about 15 miles apart on the southern fringe of Alice: Covance Research Products, Inc. and Orient BioResource Center, Inc. (formerly SNBL USA – Shin Nippon Biomedical Laboratories).

Ask people from Alice about either, and they'll likely blurt out playfully, "Oh, the monkey farms!" usually followed up with a serious explanation of how private the facilities are and why people don't feel it's their business to pry.

Alice is a perfect refuge for a controversial arm of the biomedical industry that imports thousands of monkeys – most from Asia – and then processes, quarantines and eventually sends them off to research labs all over the country. The local economy is historically dependent on

fickle oilfield work, townspeople are wary of outside attention, and city and county leaders appreciate reliable employers.

Before they can be used in research, monkeys at the farms are tested for pathogens that can be passed to people, like tuberculosis and other serious infections, and tattooed with an ID number. Monkeys stay mainly outdoors, enduring both hellacious Texas summer heat and the more problematic wintertime cold spells, when frostbite becomes a risk.

At last count, 644 monkeys were “bred, conditioned or held for (research) use” at Orient BioResource Center, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Over a recent two-year period, as described in a 2016 USDA complaint alleging failure to meet Animal Welfare Act requirements, former owner SNBL USA had grossed around \$10 million, sold almost 3,000 monkeys and provided twice that number for research from its Alice and Everett, Washington, facilities. Twenty-four macaques from the Alice facility were used in a study last year involving the deadly bacterial disease tularemia, for instance.

Covance boasts the largest “nonhuman primate” quarantine capacity in the U.S., referring on its website to 200 acres of “secure quarantine, breeding and holding space” on land assessed by Jim Wells County in 2016 at over \$2.3 million in value. Handlers provide “enrichment and socialization” services, like training monkeys to allow a pole to be attached to their collars – necessary for safely removing animals from cages. The facility also does breeding; baby monkeys are born in the springtime and at six months are weaned and raised as animals destined for research.

There are risks to employees. Monkeys bite. Their teeth can sink an inch deep into flesh. To avoid this, new CRP residents have their canines cut off and capped. But monkeys also

scratch in defense. Either attack can mean exposure to disease. That's why adequate employee training and suiting up with heavy bite-resistant gloves and protective garments are crucial.

To many in Alice, working at one of the monkey farms means holding a unique and respectable job. In an area steeped in ranching history, the monkeys are just stock after all. And if one happens to get loose, well, that happens with traditional livestock too. A cow is rounded up and on put on the county's "Notice of Estrays." But locals don't worry about catching a disease from a cow, and that's where some uneasiness about the monkey farms *does* exist in the community psyche.

As for the broader public's ethical views on the treatment of research monkeys, those don't matter much to people in Alice, despite serious and disturbing incidents reported at the two facilities over the years.

The Alice monkey farms help fuel a vast mechanism of government and private biomedical research labs, which drive the country's \$446-billion pharmaceutical industry. More locally, Covance and SNBL USA are highlighted in the Office of the Governor's "GO BIG in Texas" report as major contributors to the state's economy. Eighty-five USDA-regulated animal research facilities are located in Texas, according to The Humane Society, and "GO BIG in Texas" ranks the state as third in the nation for clinical trials.

The advocacy group National Association of Biomedical Research states that nearly all medical advances – from cancer to diabetes therapies – couldn't have been achieved without animal testing. Yet the use of animals in research grows more unpopular by the year, according to a Gallup Poll conducted in 2017 showing a nationwide 14-percentage point drop in acceptance of medical testing on animals since 2001, to 51 percent.

In January, Volkswagen and the USDA separately found themselves in trouble over past mistreatment of monkeys in research. Reports of macaques exposed to diesel fumes during a Lovelace Respiratory Research Institute's Volkswagen emissions study and the deaths of squirrel monkeys in an FDA nicotine study roiled the public and led to the removal of Volkswagen's head of media relations and to the end of the FDA's research.

Other industries in recent years have responded to pressure from animal welfare activists, including air travel. In the U.S., Delta, United, American and Virgin America have stopped transporting research monkeys.

For outsiders to Alice, concern for the monkey farms could be found last year in an obscure Animals24-7.org story on preparing Texas animals for Hurricane Harvey. "Well over 9,000 macaques" between the two facilities were estimated to be in danger. Alice avoided a direct hit. But in the Coastal Bend region three and a half weeks later, signs of the storm's impact were evident in toppled over canopies at old gas stations and palm trees stripped of their fronds.

Harvey struck Texas on Aug. 25. The monkey was sighted at Guerrero's house six days later.

By the time Jim Wells County Animal Control had shown up, the monkey was gone. The last Guerrero saw of it, the animal was headed west, toward U.S. 281.

When Sheriff Daniel Bueno entered the tiny waiting area of the Jim Wells County Sheriff's Department in Alice on a September morning last year, he made an imposing presence. He's tall and broad and wore a crisp white shirt, prominent Western-style belt buckle and trim Pancho Villa mustache. Inside his office, a life-size casting of two burly criss-crossed revolvers stood on his desk.

As soon as he heard the word “monkey,” a faint smile crossed Bueno’s face. He’s a man of few words, and it was unclear if it reflected impatience or amusement. But his demeanor abruptly switched when challenged with the potential public health risk that a wandering exotic animal posed.

“We are familiar that some of the monkeys carry infectious diseases and so on,” Bueno said. “So, we’ve been on alert. We put it out in the local paper.”

More than 70 percent of captive macaques – the type of monkeys kept in Alice – carry herpes B. A monkey can be tested a series of times and come up negative for the virus, and on the very last time, test positive. In a recent study of feral macaque monkeys in Florida, one-quarter of the animals tested positive for the disease. But an infection in humans is “extremely rare,” according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Herpes B is only spread when a monkey shedding the virus comes into physical contact with a person, typically through a scratch or bite. If infected and left untreated, the wound’s prognosis is dire: The virus attacks the central nervous system, resulting in severe brain damage or death. The survival rate, states a University of Chicago Medicine study, is around 30 percent.

Bueno said that it’s been several years since a monkey turned up in the county. And in this case, he said, county animal control was sent out to try and locate it.

After five minutes, Bueno stood up and alluded to a meeting he had to attend.

The sheriff’s report was posted on the *Alice Echo News-Journal*’s Facebook page within two hours of Charles call and became big news in town, instantly generating a flurry of responses and nearly 300 reactions. Residents were told that the search had been called off and to avoid the monkey, if found. The post also mentioned a check with an unnamed monkey farm.

“But they told officials that the monkey was not from their facility,” the report stated.

As implied by Bueno, animal control would have more information. The next stop was the Alice Dog Pound, a property isolated on the edge of the city with outdoor kennels on one side and a prefab building on the other. One of the signs out front warns visitors not to leave dead animals on the premises.



Figure 3. A Jim Wells County Sheriff's Animal Control pickup waits outside the Alice Dog Pound office. Photo by L. Rodriguez.



Figure 4. Shade is the dogs' best friend in the pound's outdoor kennels. Photo by L. Rodriguez.

Dogs barked under an open-air roof equipped with strong-blowing fans as a late-morning heat was already radiating from the dusty driveway. A county sheriff's animal control truck sat idling in front of the office. Inside, a Rod Stewart song cut through heavy cigarette smoke, while three aloof employees gathered around a desk looked up but said nothing.

About the monkey, the woman behind the desk was abrupt. She explained that the city pound didn't deal with loose wild animals – that was the county's job. That left the question about the county vehicle. The woman and another worker both gestured to the third employee, who had been quiet up until then. He identified himself as a county animal control officer but had nothing to share and referred inquiries about the monkey report back to his “boss,” the sheriff.

Chente's Restaurant just off Falfurrias Highway is a good place to find people who run city and county affairs in the Alice area. Sharing a table one winter afternoon were Jim Wells County commissioners Emede Garcia and Carlos Gonzalez and long-time commercial real estate developer Newell Atkinson III. It had been almost five months since the loose monkey sighting.

“Are you one of those liberals?” Atkinson asked right off.

Conservative in politics and attire, Atkinson looked a bit like he stepped off a set for the movie “Giant.” At one point, he pulled a small plastic filter-tipped cigar from the pocket of his vintage shirt.

Atkinson called the monkey facilities “all in all, a tremendous asset to the community” because they hire locally. Gonzalez and Garcia agreed, although because CRP falls within Gonzalez's precinct, he said he occasionally hears complaints about the condition of the county road that serves the facility.

Alice is having hard times. Its Main Street reflects the economically depressed state of many small towns in America with its national fast-food chains, pawn shop, payday loan business and Family Dollar store. Remnants of Alice's economic glory days, when hundreds of businesses flourished amid the city's midcentury oil and agricultural boom, can be seen all around town but are most noticeable in the old downtown pocket. Abandoned buildings with ghosts of names left on facades and missing or boarded-up windows face streets with zero foot traffic.

"Everything left Alice," said Christy Todd, 70. "It hurt (the town) a lot."

Todd is the guide for the South Texas Museum, the former cattle ranching office for the McGill brothers, who in the early 1900s helped establish Jim Wells County. The downtown museum has few visitors and celebrates a predominantly Anglo culture that doesn't exist anymore in a county where 80 percent of the population is Hispanic.

People burn down the city's abandoned buildings, Todd said, and she worries about a couple of empty structures surrounding the museum. The self-proclaimed first female Texas oil gauger, she rattled off names of oil companies that have left the area, including Halliburton Co.



Figure 5. The Alice branch of Oil Patch Petroleum, Inc. stands empty amid a downturn in the local oil & gas industry. Photo by L. Rodriguez.

The Eagle Ford Shale oilfield had been Alice’s major source of employment, but the recent bust about three and a half years ago has left the area with a smaller tax base and deserted oil company buildings up and down Commerce Road. Many families left for jobs elsewhere in Texas.

It’s not hard to imagine why the Alice Chamber of Commerce, county and city officials and local business leaders favorably view the monkey farms. CRP was once one of the area’s largest employers. With just a high school diploma, CRP offers an animal care specialist job at \$12 an hour plus benefits.

“Oh, that’s something else,” Atkinson said. “They hire off-duty policemen for security. At Covance.”

CRP is a subsidiary of Covance Inc., a Princeton, New Jersey-based contract research organization involved in pharmaceutical development. Covance, Inc. employs more than 15,000 people worldwide, according to the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission. In 2015 LabCorp, the largest diagnostic laboratory in the U.S., acquired Covance for \$6.1 billion.

The turn for County Road 381, an isolated bent arm that leads travelers to the CRP monkey farm, is about eight miles east of the heart of Alice. The road's surface is cracked and uneven from wear and tear. A squared-off arbor created by two mature live oaks on either side of the road takes the phantom shape of delivery trucks that have passed through.

Approaching CRP, what seems at first like open ranchland starts to develop into a bizarre scene. Distant clusters of light-colored conical roofs peek out in between trees along the property's fence line. Closer in, the structures come into view: They are rows and rows of hundreds of slightly rusty metal corn cribs, like the type used in agriculture. Dark brown silhouettes with long tails dot the interiors of several cages.



Figure 6. Monkeys perch inside corn cribs at the CRP facility in Alice last September. Photo by L. Rodriguez.

As the minutes ticked by, no other driver passed along the county road in front of the property's chain link and barbed wire security fence. Then from CRP's front gate, a black SUV with darkened windows noiselessly pulled out and began to approach. The driver slipped up alongside with his window down.

"Can I help you with something?" asked the stocky, middle-aged man in plainclothes.

When asked to confirm that it was a county road, the man instantly shifted his attitude from intimidating to helpful – in pointing out the most expedient way to exit the area. He identified himself as security then drove several yards away and parked. At every stop made on along the road, the guard tailed closely and took pictures with his phone.



Figure 7. CRP's security SUV as seen through the back window of our vehicle. The guard accelerated to catch up on the county road about a half mile away from CRP's entrance, where others' private property starts. Photo by L. Rodriguez.

Although the guard had said he wasn't a cop, Atkinson was right. Jim Wells County officers work off-duty as armed security at CRP, according to county documents obtained through a records request showing officers applying for graveyard shifts at the facility from as early as 2012.

CRP's secluded location seems ideal for a business intent on extreme privacy. But the choice wasn't deliberate.

"It just worked out that way," said Bill Robinson, former director of the CRP facility in Alice. "Land was cheap." Robinson said it also helps that the monkey farm abuts the 800,000-acre King Ranch, which runs a security helicopter along the shared border.

Robinson, 68, was there from the monkey farm's beginning.

"I drove the first fence post and got the first cage and groups of animals in February of '75," he said.



Figure 8. Having left CRP in 2013, Robinson now spends his mornings managing cross-country research monkey transportation from a booth at his favorite restaurant in San Antonio. Photo by L. Rodriguez.

Robinson had just moved to Texas from Virginia, where he worked at Hazelton Research Products Inc. – what would eventually become CRP. The National Institutes of Health had begun offering contracts to private sector monkey breeders and, Robinson said, HRP saw an opportunity. Hazelton’s director of primate toxicology Dale Boyd was in charge of finding a location with a suitable climate for the breeding facility and settled on Texas, Robinson said.



Figure 9. Robinson (center) is one of the employees featured in a Feb. 9, 1975 Alice Echo-News story on the HRP breeding center opening.



Figure 10. The CRP monkey enclosures' design goes all the way back to the farm's inception. From the Alice Echo-News, Feb. 9, 1975.

The only type of monkey HRP raised at the time – what people in the industry call “the model” – was an Indian-origin rhesus. Breeding had become necessary, Robinson said, because of India’s religiously based clampdown on monkey exports starting in 1976. HRP eventually switched to another model, a cynomolgus monkey (a crab-eating macaque imported from Cambodia, Vietnam or China), when demand became too high. CRP still breeds Indian-origin rhesus monkeys.

The farm started out with a batch of only 60 to 100 monkeys, Robinson said. And by 2014, CRP’s inventory had multiplied to over 11,000 rhesus and cynomolgus monkeys, according to a USDA inspection report. The total shrank to 466 cynomolgus monkeys two years later.

“Occasionally one would get loose,” Robinson said. “Let’s just call it someone’s inability to put a lock on a cage. Or the animals – they’re smart. They have all day to think about how to get out.”

For instance, monkeys will “smash up” the rusty part of a cage until they’re able to bend the metal and escape, said Daniel Garza, a former CRP manager.

Garza, 37, was in charge of animals in the outside quarantine area. One of his duties was to take daily walks among the enclosures to observe the monkeys. Ten to 15 monkeys at a time were housed together, he said.

“And they’re like people when they’re picking a fight,” Garza said. “When there’s trauma, and it needs to be tended to or diarrhea and they’re slightly dehydrated, you take them to the hospital and nurture them back to health.”

Animals at CRP would come and go out of “the hospital,” he said, which was an onsite room where veterinary staff would treat sick or injured monkeys. Diarrhea and trauma were

identified by SNBL USA as the leading causes of death among monkeys at quarantine facilities in its presentation to the 2017 American Association for Laboratory Animal Science meeting.

Some in Alice worry about the monkeys' welfare.

When the monkey farms come up in conversation, workers talk in a way that "makes it seems like they're doing something wrong there," said a Jim Wells County Appraisal District employee who didn't want her name used. "Makes you wonder what they're doing to those poor monkeys."

But like many in Alice, the county employee was conflicted. In the next breath, she looked up and asked: "You're not trying to close them down?"

It can be alarming when people sound off about their experiences working at the farms. On the *Alice Echo News-Journal's* Facebook report on the Ben Bolt sighting, just about everyone made jokes and shared memes, like one with a gun-toting character from "War for the Planet of the Apes." But standing out among the comments was a flippant conversation between two former monkey farm employees who recounted disturbing on-the-job incidents.

"I remember driving up to the rhesus breeding colony and seeing 50 loose monkeys because someone left the juvie enclosure open," Nathan Charles wrote.

Charles, a certified laboratory animal technician, said he had worked at both CRP and SNBL USA.

Replying to Charles' Facebook comment, former CRP worker Aaron David Gonzalez described loose monkeys climbing up the farm's utility poles and electrocuting themselves on transformers.

"No ketamine was needed that day," Gonzalez wrote. (Ketamine is often used as an anesthetic in veterinary medicine.)

Charles replied: “Lol... Good ole Texas BBQ right there haha.”

Gonzalez’s last comment was about being scratched by a “positive monkey” but considering himself “lucky” because the animal wasn’t infectious at the time.

Within the last decade, Alice’s monkey farms have faced a string of USDA complaints and fines because of animal mistreatment. Three monkeys were discovered with broken limbs at CRP in 2016, the same year the facility was fined \$31,500 for violating the AWA when 13 monkeys died from overheating. For SNBL USA, which has past AWA violations, it was recently the subject of a USDA complaint involving the deaths of 38 monkeys over five years, including 25 Cambodia-origin monkeys that died from hypoglycemia and dehydration as a result of negligent care while being transported from Houston Intercontinental Airport to SNBL USA facilities in Everett, Washington, and Alice.

Indications of poor health among CRP monkeys surfaced nine years ago when three-fifths of a group transported from Alice to the University of California San Francisco arrived with injuries, like missing digits, damaged ears, frostbite damage on tails and puncture wounds, some from self-injury, according to a complaint filed by animal welfare group Stop Animal Exploitation Now! A UCSF medical profile describes one monkey being euthanized upon arrival because her injuries were so severe.

It was the UCSF story that Commissioner Garcia, back at Chente’s, took like a personal dig against his community. Treating it like fake news, he began to stab at an alternative reason for the animals’ conditions.

“You might make a note of those ‘old monkeys’ that went to California,” Garcia said. “That they’re probably old. They get old too.”

The average age of a rhesus monkey is 25 to 30 years. The euthanized monkey at UCSF was 9 years old.

Garza had been hesitant to talk about CRP because he'd been bound to a nondisclosure agreement. But his real fear, he said, was exposing work acquaintances to an animal-rights backlash. Through attempts to contact Garza and other former employees, it soon became clear that withholding information seemed less about adhering to an NDA and more about not betraying a certain brotherhood of Alice monkey handlers. It was them against the nosy animal-rights people.

Orient BioResource Center's previous owner SNBL USA started its Alice operation in 2007 with a goal of breeding nonhuman primates for the pharmaceutical and biotechnology industries. Last year SNBL USA transferred the Alice monkey farm assets to Orient Bio Inc., a South Korean contract research organization, which became SNBL's primary supplier.

Orient BioResource Center is set smack dab in the center of 500 acres of mesquite trees and cacti off County Road 625. Atkinson remembered when a friend of his helped the former SNBL USA find its current location over a decade ago.

"He told me they were very concerned about neighbors (wondering) about what was going on with the monkeys," he said as he drew on a restaurant napkin a tiny square inside a larger square. "Their concern was to have a nice buffer around it."

On a sunny February morning there was no activity at the Orient BioResource Center entrance except for a pickup with a long white windowless trailer in tow that took an aggressive

turn into the chalky driveway and through an open gate, kicking up clouds of dust as it plowed through the winding brush-lined drive.

“PETA is a terrorist organization,” said the vice president of Orient BioResource Center, who, although his LinkedIn profile is public, asked that his name not be published out of concern for retaliation by animal welfare groups. Deeply suspicious of inquiries, he went on to reference unspecific stories of firebombed homes and researchers harassed in parking lots.

There is no record of PETA visiting Alice. But PETA does own stock in LabCorp and regularly presents shareholder resolutions designed to stop Covance labs from using animals.

The paranoia seems out of proportion. The monkey farms have never been a draw for onsite animal-rights activity due to the remoteness of South Texas – not to mention the fringe benefit of small-town intimidation.

“Alice, Texas, is very rural, very far, very hunter-oriented. They carry guns. They use them. And *Alice Echo* is a three-page newspaper,” Robinson said. “What are (activists) gonna get when they get there? Grief. You’re messing with the town.”

Not to say that Alice has never blipped on activists’ radars. While still HRP, the facility encountered a public-relations nightmare in 1996 when reports were leaked to the media about a potential Ebola virus outbreak at the monkey farm. A previous monkey Ebola scare in Virginia had inspired Richard Preston’s book “The Hot Zone.”

Monkeys had arrived at HRP from the Philippines with simian hemorrhagic fever virus (SHFV). An infected monkey died, and per protocol, HRP sent its tissues and blood samples to the CDC. As Robinson recounted, the monkey died on a Thursday and by Monday, the national news was calling him about “a deadly virus.” That evening, local and national news trucks were camped outside the farm’s gates.

But SHFV wasn't the only virus the Philippines-origin monkeys carried. The CDC had also detected in samples a strain of Ebola (Reston ebolavirus) pathogenic to monkeys but not humans, according to the textbook "Viruses and Human Disease." The news set off a national alarm, with worry for the virus mutating and spreading to people. For many in Alice, it was the first they heard of the HRP monkey farm.

"Places that we used to go all the time – Chente's, for example – the waiters that always waited on me wouldn't get near me," Robinson said. "People that worked with my wife wanted to know why she was sleeping with me."

Residents continue to be suspicious, especially when rumors persist about careless handling at the farms and monkeys breaking loose.

Monkeys are intelligent animals with complex social lives, and animal welfare advocates like Tim Ajax, director of the Born Free USA primate sanctuary in Dilley, say they should never be kept in captivity.

"(It's the) same construct in the cattle ranching industry as in raising monkeys, where there's profit and loss," Ajax said. "(But) cattle have been domesticated – their defensiveness has been bred out of them. You can't take that approach with monkeys."

Born Free USA, situated midway between San Antonio and Laredo, is home to Texas' wild monkeys – descendants of a Japanese snow monkey troop brought to Dilley decades ago. But it also takes in former pets and retired lab monkeys, which are lucky residents considering that only one or two out of every 10,000 research monkeys experience retirement, Ajax said.

At the sanctuary, a pair of former lab monkeys were sitting inside a large, isolated enclosure. The female rhesus was slowly bringing her foot up around the side of her face, while the male grimaced at Ajax.



Figure 11. Ajax feeds a pair of former research monkeys from a safe distance at the Born Free USA sanctuary. Photo by L. Rodriguez.

“See what she’s doing with that foot?” he asked. “That’s not normal.”

Ajax explained that if anyone were to offer their hand to either monkey, the animals would attack it because they’re confused. That’s the risk of encountering a monkey from one of the farms.

“A young man from one of those places died,” said former Alice Mayor Grace Lopez. “He got, I think, a scratch from a monkey. At Covance.”

Lopez said the incident was kept out of the media.

Robinson hasn’t corroborated the story but a search for court records in Texas yielded a Harris County civil case involving former HRP monkey handler Saturnino Zuniga, who’s named as one of the plaintiffs in a 2008 lawsuit against CRP. Zuniga claimed he was infected with herpes B by a monkey while working at HRP during the 1980s. The case was settled for an undisclosed amount, with CRP denying liability. It is unknown if Zuniga died from his illness.

This wasn’t an isolated event. At least one other HRP employee had been infected with herpes B around 1995 – a veterinarian who “had little direct contact” with monkeys at the

facility, according the report “A Few Things about Monkeys” on the Max Planck Institute for Biological Cybernetics website and as referenced in a *Washington Post* story on the monkey Ebola event at HRP. It was unknown how the employee contracted the disease. But within a week of showing symptoms, the report states, he had lapsed into a coma and died.

If loose, even a monkey raised in captivity can fend for itself fairly well on ranchland. In his Facebook comments, Nathan Charles described how one monkey during the breakout at one of the facilities got away, at least for a while.

“It was shot on a deer lease a few months later – identified by its chest tattoo,” Charles wrote. “It was eating corn and drinking out of a *canoga*.” (A canoga is a cattle trough.)

In fact, it’s the common consensus in Alice that the Ben Bolt monkey is an escapee from one of the farms, except with Robinson. He said he believes it’s a roving Texas snow monkey from the Born Free USA sanctuary over 120 miles away. It’s true that snow monkeys have the run of the sanctuary grounds, but Ajax said he doubts that it’s one of theirs.



Figure 12. A macaque at the Born Free USA sanctuary sits in the highest branches of a tree as a lookout for its troop. Photo by L. Rodriguez.

Back in Ben Bolt and almost a half a year after seeing the monkey, Guerrero peeked out warily from a crack in her open storm door, then ventured down her front walkway, remaining a few feet behind her locked gate. To describe the animal she saw last August, she gestured with her arm to mimic the length and curl of a long tail.

When Ajax heard Guerrero's description, he said, "Probably one of theirs," referring to the CRP monkey farm. Making a two-inch space between his thumb and finger, Ajax demonstrated the length of a snow monkey's tail – calling it a "nub." Monkeys on the farms – rhesus and cynomolgous – have tails between eight and nine inches long.

To this day, there's been no more sign of the Ben Bolt monkey.

Note: The writer's husband is the nephew of former Alice Mayor Grace Lopez.

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Emede Garcia (Jim Wells County commissioner, Pct. 4), in-person interview, Feb. 2018.

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Francisca Guerrero (Ben Bolt, Texas, resident who witnessed loose monkey), in-person interview, Feb. 2018.

Grace Lopez (former mayor of Alice, Texas), in-person interview, Feb. 2018.

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Bill Robinson (former director, Covance Research Products Inc.), in-person interview, Feb. 2018.

Willie Ruiz (Alice ISD interim superintendent), in-person interview, Feb. 2018.

Christy Todd (guide at the South Texas Museum, Alice, Texas), personal communication, Feb. 2018.

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Luis (“Louie”) Valdez (Jim Wells County deputy sheriff), in-person interview, Sept. 2017.

Juliette Wood (GIS Draftsman/Researcher at Jim Wells County Appraisal District), personal communication, Sept. 2017.

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